



Conflict Resolution

Fort Leonard Wood Equal Employment Opportunity
Office



Conflict Is

- As common as the air we breathe
- A verb meaning “striking together”
- A noun meaning “a fight, battle, or struggle”
- “...A situation in which **interdependent** people express (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their **individual needs and interests**, and they experience **interference** from each other in accomplishing these goals”

Donohue and Kirk quoted in Holton, Susan A., ed., *Conflict Management in Higher Education*, p. 5, (1995) Jossey-Bass Publishers.



Conflict Myths and Illusions

- Conflict is destructive.
- Conflict should be avoided.
- Conflict is a personality problem.
- Managers create the most conflict for employees.
- There is only one right way to handle conflict.

From W.H. Gmelch, "The Janus Syndrome: Managing Conflict from the Middle," in *Mending the Cracks in the Ivory Tower: Strategies for Conflict Management in Higher Education*, S.A. Horton, ed., (1998), Anker Publishing

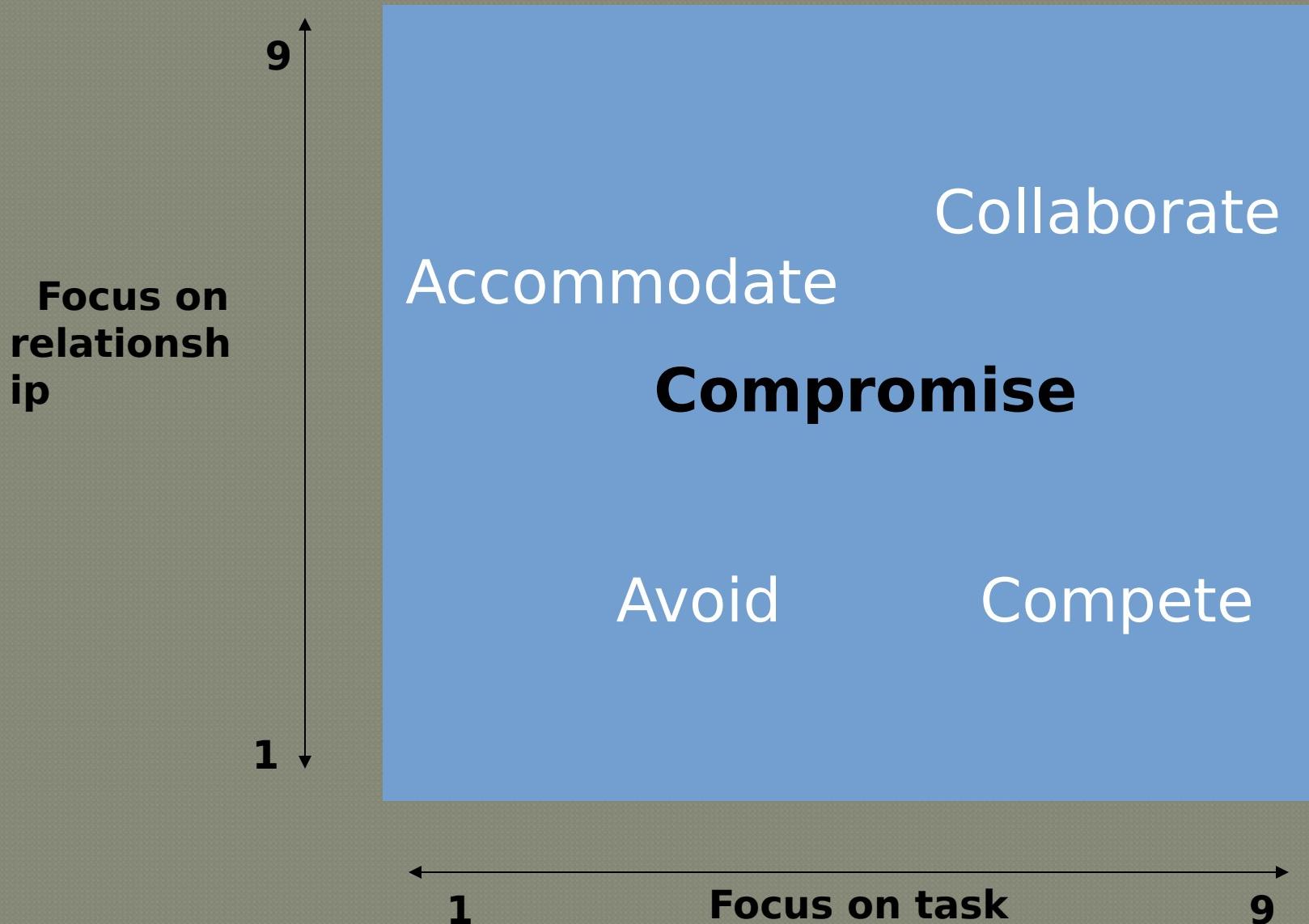
We need productive ways to utilize conflict as momentum for change by:

- Focusing on the facts
- Considering multiple alternatives
- Creating common goals.
- Cultivating a culture of openness and fairness
- Using humor



Resolution or Management Conflict

Conflict Resolution Strategies





5 Strategies for Dealing with Conflict

- Avoid (I lose/you lose)
- Accommodate (I lose/you win)
- Compete (I win/you lose)
- Compromise (I win a little/you win a little)
- Collaborate (I win/you win)



Factors Affecting the Choice of a Strategy

- Nature and value of the relationship
- Importance and complexity of the issue(s)
- Relative power
- Time



Drawbacks to an Avoidance Strategy

- The situation may not “go away” and may escalate
- You may lose respect of those who expect you to engage
- You lose the opportunity to understand the other person(s) perhaps deeper feelings and issues
- You don’t get what you need or might have negotiated for yourself



Accommodate – When?

- The issues and possible solutions are less important than maintaining good will
- To signal concern for the other – may put a favor “in the bank” – when you have greater power
- To cut your losses when you lack power or leverage
- When dealing with people who are violent, discontented, and can cause much damage



Drawbacks to an Accommodating Strategy

- Competitive people may take advantage of you - a temporary fix leading to escalation
- You may set a precedent that results in your being overworked, overlooked and/or perceived as a “wimp”
- You may bend too quickly before you understand the situation clearly



Compete - When?

- Important issues are at stake - you know you are right
- You don't need the cooperation or good will of the other party in the future - you don't care what they think or how they feel
- You are negotiating with another person who is competitive
- You want to look tough & competent in front of an audience or constituency
- You have sufficient power to carry it off



Drawbacks to a Competing Strategy

- You may not have the best solution – may stifle contribution and commitment
- You may alienate key people that you need down the road
- “What goes around comes around”



Compromise – When?

- Stalemate: goals are opposite and power is equal
- When other approaches don't work
- Not enough time or importance to mount a full fledged collaborative effort
- Parties have similar ideas about what constitutes fairness of procedure and outcome



Drawbacks to a Compromise Strategy

- Its short term focus means you may lose sight of principles, own needs, and long term objectives
- Creates precedents that may be damaging in later situations
- Sweeps the conflict under the rug but avoids finding out what it is really all about



Collaborate – When?

- Cooperation of all will be needed to carry out the decisions
- Deeply felt concerns, divergent perspectives, people unwilling to compromise
- Those involved need to learn more about the issues and options



When To Collaborate *(Cont'd.)*

- Emotions are running high or a relationship has been damaged but all are committed to finding a solution and are interdependent
- A decision will have far reaching consequences
- A workable solution is not evident - creativity and synthesis are needed
- Time and attention are available
- You want to offer practice in the technique



Drawbacks to Collaboration

- It takes time, energy, effort, commitment from all sides
- Decisions are slow – meetings are soggy
- Disagreements about, and impatience with, process can derail focus on content and end result
- If the environment is highly polarized it may be very difficult to implement



Best Practices

- Include specific goals, acceptable behavior, and complaint procedures in written counseling
- Conduct sensing/employee feedback sessions at least quarterly
- Conduct team meetings at least once a week
- Foster an environment where collaboration and team-work are the basis for acceptable business practices. Consider peer reviews.
- Be quick to correct dysfunctional behavior immediately
- LEAD BY EXAMPLE



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QUESTIONS?